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ABSTRACT

Discussing results of the third Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) survey of attainment in English language of a representative sample of pupils throughout Scotland, this leaflet highlights areas where improvement in the performance could be made. The leaflet covers the four outcomes--listening, talking, reading, writing--in four columns. Reading down each column in the leaflet shows: (1) what skills were assessed; (2) key findings for the survey of pupils at primary 4, primary 7, and secondary 2 stages; (3) teaching issues which arise from the findings; and (4) some ideas to use in the classroom. The leaflet can be used for teachers' personal reading, staff meetings and group discussions, and staff development activities. The leaflet also presents other ideas for teaching and assessment, and lists five other resources teachers can use. (RS)

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ED 373 359

FEEDBACK 2

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(Scottish Office Education Dept., 1994)

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Feedback 2

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The English language AAP survey

The third Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) survey of pupils' attainment in English language was carried out in 1992 by a research team at the Centre for Research on Learning and Instruction at the University of Edinburgh. The assessment tasks were completed by a representative sample of pupils throughout Scotland at three stages: primary 4, primary 7 and secondary 2.

The assessment framework was based on the concepts of purpose, context and audience used in the four language outcomes — listening, talking, reading and writing. The attainment targets and programmes of study set out in the English language curriculum guidelines for five to 14 year olds were taken into account when developing the framework and tasks.

Each pupil in the survey completed activities in two of the language outcomes, listening and talking or reading and writing, based on a single topic and set within a context with a clearly defined purpose and audience.

The survey findings show that a lot of good work is being done at all stages and the 5–14 curriculum is broadening approaches to English language teaching. This *Feedback* highlights areas where improvement in pupils' performance could be made.

Feedback

This leaflet covers the four outcomes — listening, talking, reading, writing — in four columns. Reading down each column the sections show:

- what skills were assessed in the AAP and how, plus relevant strands from the 5–14 guidelines;
- key findings from the survey, which you can use to compare with the performance of your own pupils;
- teaching issues which arise from the findings; and
- some ideas to use in the classroom.

At the end, *Feedback* gives other ideas for teaching and assessment and lists some other resources you can use.

Use this leaflet for:

- Personal reading: for reflecting on achievement in your classroom, for assessing class work and preparing assessment tasks.
- Staff meetings and group discussions: reviewing teaching plans in relation to 5–14 attainment targets.
- Staff development: considering effective teaching strategies in English language; and helping student teachers as part of their professional training.

Why not pin it up on the staff noticeboard?
Help us to disseminate the AAP findings to as many teachers as possible (try pinning two leaflets together in a strip, with both sides showing).

AAP

Information for teachers — from the Assessment of Achievement Programme

LISTENING

AAP purposes:
Obtaining information
Gaining an understanding of the ideas and opinions of others
Interacting with others
Appreciating the feelings of others

5–14 strands:
Listening for information, instructions and directions
Listening in groups

Assessment methods:
1. The teacher introduced the topic and discussed it briefly with pupils, *then*
2. Pupils listened to an audio tape or watched a video tape, *then*
3. They completed a written worksheet. This assessed their understanding of main ideas, underlying ideas and details, and some abstract concepts. Question types included summary completion, true/false/can't tell, multiple choice sentence completion.

How well pupils performed

Recall of information
- The majority of pupils at all stages could understand the main ideas and recall information that was visually reinforced by video.
- Many pupils at P4 had particular difficulty recollecting information that was not visually reinforced, but at S2 the majority were able to recall details, even when these were not visually reinforced.

Demonstrating understanding
- At P4 and P7, many pupils were distracted by details and unable to grasp an overview of the task. By S2 pupils could demonstrate an understanding of the task as a whole.
- At all stages, many pupils had difficulty recalling and making use of information of an abstract nature.
- At all stages, but especially at P4 and P7, many pupils had difficulty reconstructing ideas using their own words.
- At P7 in particular some pupils gave up too easily and simply did not attempt to answer some questions from the audio tape.

What was assessed and how

Do your pupils:
- know in advance the purpose for listening and have some idea of what they will be hearing or seeing?
- stand back mentally from recollected text and images to understand the significance of the whole task?
- understand in simple terms the structure of listening tasks, e.g. how the details contribute to the whole — even when abstract in nature?

Do you:
- involve pupils in activities using audio and video tapes to improve their ability to listen or watch with understanding?
- plan activities so that the source text is interesting and, where possible, relevant to other classroom activities?
- choose activities appropriate in length? AAP has shown that effective concentration on listening is about five minutes at P4 and eight minutes at P7, though this can be extended when watching as well.
- encourage pupils to respond in different ways: orally, in writing and by actions (doing something)?

Try listening activities which examine a variety of language: sounds of words, rhythms of poems, dialects, different genres, etc.
Use news items, poems, stories, drama, etc, for older pupils — to examine the structures of different listening texts.
Use visual reinforcements with younger pupils, e.g. pictures, map, diagram, when using an audio tape.
Get pupils to summarise content in a few words, perhaps by providing an appropriate title or a one-sentence explanation.
Before listening: *introduce listening activities with a group or class by exploring the topic.*
And after... *use follow-up activities which help pupils develop the confidence to use their own words to summarise and respond to the listening task.*

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TALKING

AAP purposes:

Conveying information
Presenting ideas and opinions and sharing these with others
Interacting with others
Expressing feelings
Defending ideas and opinions when and where appropriate
Presenting and sharing experiences with others

5–14 strands:

Conveying information, instructions and directions
Talking in groups
Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions
Audience awareness

Assessment methods

Talking followed the listening task, on the same theme.

1. Pupils had an unassessed group discussion to exchange ideas, following points on a discussion sheet, *then*
2. An assessor listened to the pupils in pairs, *and*
3. Took part in a short three-way conversation which explored further some of the pupils' ideas. (See 'Other ideas' section for the assessment criteria.)

How well pupils performed

Communication skills

- At all stages pupils were willing to participate and able to make themselves heard and understood.

Content

- Most pupils were able to convey items of information and made an effort to help the listener to understand.
- At P4 and P7 many pupils talked easily about their personal feelings and experiences; some S2 pupils were more reluctant.

Structure

- Many pupils at all stages had difficulty organising their thoughts and presenting them in a logical sequence.
- Pupils at all stages had difficulty building on others' contributions in developing ideas.

What was assessed and how

Do your pupils:

- participate in a wide variety of talking activities in a variety of situations?
- understand the needs of an audience and the purpose for talking?
- decide what they want to say and know how to organise their thoughts?
- feel that their contributions are valued and value the input of others?

Do you:

- give pupils opportunities to express their feelings and give their point of view?
- give them confidence in their ability to be good listeners who make use of the ideas of others?
- provide good examples of talk from a variety of sources to develop pupils' confidence and communication skills?

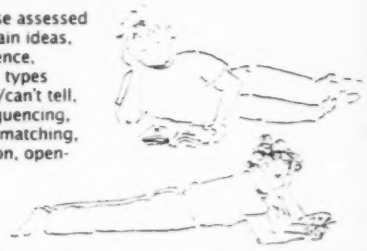
Use a variety of talking situations: e.g. message relaying, debating, reporting, story telling, retelling a story, group discussions, problem solving and games, in which every idea builds on a previous idea.
Encourage pupils to take notes or follow a plan.
Before talking: *discuss with the class/group the general topic and share ideas.*
And after... *use follow-up activities to encourage competent communication skills.*

READING

AAP purposes:
Obtaining information
Gaining an understanding of the ideas, experiences and opinions presented in texts
Appreciating the feelings of others

5–14 strands:
Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft
Awareness of genre

Assessment methods:
1. Pupils read two texts, one informative, one narrative, on a single theme, *then*
2. They completed written worksheets. These assessed their understanding of factual content, main ideas, underlying ideas and details, use of inference, vocabulary, writer's craft, genre. Question types included summary completion, true/false/can't tell, multiple choice, sentence completion, sequencing, prediction, diagram labelling, vocabulary matching, phrase finding, identifying fact and opinion, open-ended questions.



Understanding main ideas
- Most pupils could understand the main ideas in a text, whether narrative or informative, and could identify straightforward aspects of character and feelings.
- At P4, there were some quite competent and confident readers, but also a small number still struggling with individual words and unable to read and understand a whole piece of text.
- At P4, most pupils were able to sequence statements about the beginning and end of the story, but had difficulty ordering ideas in the middle.

Understanding details
- Although most P4 pupils could understand the main ideas of a text, many did not re-read for specific information or details.

Making inferences
- At P7, a small number of pupils demonstrated an appreciation of the underlying implications and subtleties of both narrative and informative texts, but many pupils gave up when answers were not instant and obvious. By S2, pupils were more willing to work at finding an answer.
- Many pupils at both P7 and S2 had difficulty making inferences from what they had read.

Understanding the writer's craft
- Although S2 pupils generally showed a growing confidence in reading skills and ability adapt to a variety of language styles, both P7 and S2 had difficulty with questions about the writer's craft: choice of vocabulary, use of figurative language, links between writing techniques and content, etc.

Do your pupils:
- understand the full meaning of what they are reading and not just recognise the words?
- re-read parts of a text to clarify their understanding and to find clues to implied meaning?

Do you:
- plan reading activities to suit the classroom context so that the purpose of reading will be clear to all pupils?
- encourage pupils to participate actively in their reading activities, e.g. considering how an author achieves an atmosphere of tension or how a scene has been vividly painted?
- help pupils to examine the shape and construction of a text, e.g. introduction, conclusion, summary of content, sequence of events, to increase awareness of organisation and structure in their own writing?
- use close reading to alert pupils to an author's use of particular language features or techniques to convey meaning, e.g. use of adjectives, similes, paragraph structure, punctuation, scene setting, creation of atmosphere?
- ensure that the school/class library has something for everybody? Less advanced readers need books appropriate to their age and interests as well as their ability.

Set aside a short quiet time on a regular basis where reading is exclusively for enjoyment.
Use sensitive, informal discussions about what everybody is reading, including yourself.
Have a trip to the local library — to make it less daunting.
Use book reviews to explore how the author has used his/her craft to capture the imagination.
***Before reading:** give pupils an idea of what the book/passage contains and why they are reading it (this is analogous to reading the synopsis on the back of a book).*
***And after...** use follow-up activities which make use of what has been read — to remind pupils of the need to read for meaning.*

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WRITING

AAP purposes:
Conveying information
Expressing feelings
Planning, expressing and explaining ideas and opinions
Recording and relating experiences

5–14 strands:
Functional writing
Personal writing
Imaginative writing
Punctuation and structure
Spelling

Assessment methods:
Writing followed the reading task, on the same themes.
1. Pupils briefly discussed the topic in groups, *then*
2. They could use a planning page to organise their ideas before the writing task, *then*
3. They completed a writing task (either informative, imaginative, personal or poetry). This was assessed with graded task-specific criteria in three categories: command and use of language, choice and organisation of ideas and mechanical skills.

Command and use of language
- A few P4 pupils demonstrated a writing maturity beyond their years, but many at this stage had only a limited concept of how to express ideas in writing and were still developing their skills of word and sentence construction.
- There were some imaginative, entertaining stories written; however, at all stages, many stories were mundane and derivative and lacked a coherent story line, despite the familiarity of the genre.
- Most P7 and S2 pupils were willing to attempt poetry writing, but many seemed unaware of the need for careful and thoughtful choice of words to achieve a poetic effect.
- Some S2 pupils seemed to be unfamiliar with an appropriate vocabulary and tone for writing a short report.

Choice and organisation of ideas
- Although the planning page provided in the AAP tasks appeared to help many pupils to organise their ideas, there were still many cases at all stages where the writing lacked structure and logical sequence.
- Many P4 pupils had difficulty writing instructions.
- At both P4 and P7, pupils' best writing was produced in the letter-writing task where the format was structured and familiar.

Technical skills
- While some pupils were very competent, quite a large number at all stages still have some weakness in spelling, punctuation, linkage and paragraphing.

Do your pupils:
- use an appropriate tone and style in their writing and understand the purpose and audience (real or imaginary)?
- understand the importance of competent writing skills in subject areas other than English?
- make a connection between language lessons or features discovered in reading and their own writing activities?

Do you:
- guide pupils in selecting and ordering their ideas, encourage them to clarify and expand their thinking, and give a positive response to what they have written? Everybody has a story to tell.
- give individual time to discuss a pupil's writing, acknowledging that it is worthwhile and highlighting the positive aspects ?
- plan writing tasks so that they are relevant to other classroom activities and have a clear purpose and audience?
- use a variety of reading contexts and genres, so that pupils become familiar with a variety of writing forms and with the ideas of appropriate register, tone, style, vocabulary?

Get pupils to use different planning formats, perhaps a planning page, to give order and structure to written work (see example opposite).

Get pupils to keep their own writer's notebook. These records of personal observations and impressions can be used as a resource for poetry and story writing.

Use word processors to reduce laborious redrafting; the production of a fair copy for display or 'publication' gives pupils self-esteem and pride in their work.

Before writing: *discuss with the class/group the general topic and share ideas to help establish the context for writing.*

And after... *go through problem areas one or two at a time, individually with pupils, e.g. use of capital letters, paragraphing, use of adjectives.*

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OTHER IDEAS FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

Examples of criteria for assessing talking

Communication skills
Shows attention to task and willingly participates
Speech is clearly delivered and can easily be heard
Tone and register are adjusted to the purpose and audience
Body position, gestures and eye contact support oral presentation
Alert to and interacts sensitively with others

Content
Conveys relevant items of information and instruction
Ideas will be relevant and varied
Can support an opinion /point of view with reasons /examples when required
Talks easily about personal experiences, feelings or interests

Structure
Ideas are sequenced logically and show progression
Readily provides explanations, helping listener to understand
Builds on others' contributions in developing ideas

Example of a planning page for writing

The Masked Adventure (P4 story-writing task):
Imagine you have found a mask. It is a very intersting mask and you decide to wear it. When you have put it on you find that you do not want to take it off. Your mask seems to lead you into some strange happenings. Write a story about The Masked Adventure. Jot down your ideas in the boxes below.

What my mask looks like.	How I felt when I put on my mask.
Where I went.	What happened.

When you have planned your story start your writing.
Now use your ideas to write your story.

Other resources

- *National guidelines. English language 5–14*. Edinburgh: Scottish Office Education Department, 1991.
- *5-14 catalogue. English language*. Dundee: Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1992.
- *HearSay*. David Northcroft. Edinburgh: Scottish Curriculum Development Service, 1984.
- *Diagnostic procedures 5–14. Taking a closer look at English language. Reading*. Edinburgh: SCRE/SOED (in press).
- *Diagnostic procedures 5–14. Taking a closer look at English language. Writing*. Edinburgh: SCRE/SOED (in press).

More details of the findings are published in ***Assessment of Achievement Programme. English Language 1992.*** Available from HMSO bookshops and the HMSO Publications Centre (tel: 071-873 9090), price £8.00.

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